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H-Bomb Off By 4 Miles, A. F. Admits 'Human Error,' Quarles Asserts

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WASHINGTON, June 16.

The United States Air Force was off target by something less than four miles when it dropped a hydrogen bomb from a B-52 in the May 21 Bikini test, it was officially stated today.

Air Force Secretary Donald A. Quarles, making the official announcement, said the error had no serious effect on the result of the test. He did not stress this point, but neither would an error of this magnitude seriously affect the result in combat use of this weapon, because of its terrific devastating range.

Mr. Quarles issued the statement after more than twenty-four hours of published reports that the bomb drop had been off target by as much as seven miles. He said it was due to "human error," not to any malfunction of equipment.

Meanwhile, Adm. Lewis L. Strauss, chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, and Allen W. Dulles, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, took off for the Pacific to witness a new test, which some experts say may be the "most interesting" of the current series. It may involve test of a guided missile with a hydrogen warhead.

Quarles Statement

Originally, Secretary Quarles said, it had been thought best not to talk officially about the error, "not to shield any error" but simply because it was deemed "wiser." It is accepted military doctrine not to give a potential enemy too much information about details of new weapons tests. But, he said, "recent events make it time for frank admission."

He issued this statement:

"Due to a human error, the recent thermo-nuclear bomb dropped by a B-52 aircraft at Bikini exploded somewhat less than four miles short of the planned point."

"The error was in the manipulation of the bombing equipment and did not involve malfunction of the aircraft or any of the equipment which it carried."

"While the error was considerably more than normally expected, it was not great enough to have a serious effect on the success of the experiment."

Cites "Arithmetic"

Asked by a reporter whether the error could have been serious under battle conditions, Mr. Quarles dryly remarked: "The arithmetic is pretty obviously."

Estimates put the ground "coverage" of a blast of this magnitude, equal to 10,000,000 tons of TNT, over an area with a diameter of twelve miles.

En route for the new tests with Adm. Strauss and Mr. Dulles were Dillon Anderson, special assistant to President Eisenhower on national security affairs, and Amos J. Peaslee, deputy to Harold E. Stassen, the President's assistant for disarmament planning.